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ABSTRACT

An inner-city "community school district" in Washington, D.C. is a pilot project in decentralized urban education. The Anacostia Community School Project (ACSP) was founded in 1968, and comprises 11 schools. The population of the school district is poor, black, and young, and lives largely either in the housing projects or more expensive but often dilapidated garden apartments. Typically, families have recently moved, often because of eviction for urban renewal. ACSP has provided an opportunity to use a variety of techniques in mental health consultation. A group of consultants has encountered several issues which impede the education of poor, black, urban children: mistrust, prejudice, and despair appear when divergent groups have attempted to work together. A consultant, too, must confront issues of his own in moving into this setting--especially his messianic ambitions. Sharing both hopelessness and hope, discussing techniques which succeed and those which fail, and supporting firm leadership, appear to be useful principles of consultation. Ultimately, local community control of schools appears to be a necessary prerequisite of educational reform (Author/JM)

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MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION IN AN URBAN "COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEM"

Written for Presentation in a Round Table Discussion:

Community Schools as an Agent of Social Change:
The Anacostia Community Schools and Mental Health Consultation

THE 49th ANNUAL MEETING
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INTRODUCTION

An inner-city "community school district" in Washington, D.C. is a pilot project in decentralized urban education. It has provided an opportunity to use a variety of techniques in mental health consultation. A group of consultants has encountered several issues which impede the education of poor, black, urban children; mistrust, prejudice and despair appear when divergent groups have attempted to work together. A consultant, too, must confront issues of his own in moving into this setting--especially his messianic ambitions. Sharing both hopelessness and hope, discussing techniques which succeed and those which fail, and supporting firm leadership, appear to be useful principles of consultation. Ultimately, local community control of schools appears to be a necessary prerequisite of educational reform.

THE ANACOSTIA COMMUNITY SCHOOL PROJECT

The Anacostia Community School Project (ACSP) was founded in 1968. It was announced, in a speech by President Johnson, that there would be a model for urban education located in the nation's capitol. Although the Anacostia community did not initiate the idea of a community school district, it fought a battle for the "spoils."

Geographically, Anacostia is divided from the rest of Washington, by the Anacostia River. In the last few years, the bulk of Washington's public housing has been built there. From a stable, predominately white middle class area, it has deteriorated to a black ghetto. A relatively small percentage of those who live here now did so ten years ago. Many families date difficulties to their forced dislocation from other sections of Washington, where they claim to have been getting on well. They migrated into an area with a deficiency in community feeling and resources.

The eleven schools constituting the ACSP border three sides of the gigantic Federal Mental Hospital, Saint Elizabeths. The population of the school district is poor, black, young, and lives largely either in the housing projects or more expensive but often dilapidated garden apartments. Typically, families have recently moved, often because of eviction for urban renewal. (10)

The founding of ACSP represented an announced national priority for urban education. There were several community action groups in Anacostia

which participated in locating ACSP there. As in other places, the boards of several action programs often share some members.

The first event was a month-long summer workshop to gain awareness of needs, investigate other programs, and prepare a document establishing priorities and plans. The planning group consisted of community people, educators, and experts from various fields. This group prepared an extensive document, estimating an initial cost of $15 million, ranking suggested programs in order of priority. A bill proposing this was submitted to congress, but passed only at the level of $1.5 million. In retrospect, one wonders if a compromise of this sort is worth living with--for it set up a demonstration project, for national inspection, with such a token status that it is questionable if it could succeed.

This was not the only initial compromise: The original administrative plan of the Project made the Project Director equally answerable to the city's Public School System and to its own Area Citizens' Board. Further, the portion of the funds which paid for the "guts" of the schools--salaries, buildings, upkeep, and basic supplies--all went through the central office. Anything the Project wanted to do differently had to be negotiated with the central bureaucracy--and often met with the same excuses which plague the schools generally. Teachers and other personnel were allowed, by arrangement with the teachers' union, to transfer elsewhere without prejudice. Some did, but for most teachers nothing changed because the old resistance to change were not removed and were not dealt with.

My view of the origins of ACSP is that they were a series of almost

fatal compromises. Overcoming them would have been a Herculean task. Let me list some compromises:

1) The Director, and through him the whole organization, had two allegiences. One was to the school system (a vast bureaucracy), and the other to the community, to social and educational change. It has been widely said, since the Project's recent announced termination, that it would have required an outsider with a clear allegience to change and to community needs, one who had no stake in the established school system to make things work.

2) The Project was established in the least stable, most deteriorating area of the city,(10) an area without established consistent leadership, in what is not really a self-contained school unit.*

3) The community did not ask for the Project, and in its ghetto culture of apathy, did not offer active support. It functioned with varying degrees of effectiveness and confusion but never moved to a role of substantial control.

4) Teachers and schools were never sufficiently reoriented. Instead, ancillary personnel, with far fewer credentials than the teachers, were put in to assist them with an unrealistic messianic mission. The ancillary personnel were area residents, with high school educations at most,

*Although one high school, two junior highs, and eight elementary schools appear to constitute a kind of feeder system, in practice they do not. There is considerable overlap with other schools and need for coordination with them, compromising the autonomy of ACSP as an independent system.

and were put into two of the most difficult areas of the Project: reading improvement and community organization.

The goals of the ACSP were a) to demonstrate excellence in urban education in a decentralized school system which was responsive to the community, and b) to initiate general social change through educational change. The major programs begun by the Project included: 1) decentralization of administration to a unit of the eleven schools; 2) a major reading effort employing about 150 indigenous workers; 3) community organization; 4) a unit training high school students in data processing; 5) a pre-school or Headstart unit. I will deal primarily with views from inside one of the schools, the community organizing unit, and the pre-school unit.

The ACSP was to receive extensive support and advice from the U.S. Office of Education. It is generally agreed by the Office of Education itself that such support and guidance were inconstant, and vascillated from overcontrol to neglect. If behavior is a good index of the "functional intentions" of an organization, there must have been a fundamental ambivalence in the Office of Education itself concerning such projects and priorities, especially in the transition from Democratic to Republican Administrations. A possible alternative or supplementary explanation is the assumption of gross inefficiency and ineffectiveness inside the Office of Education. Neither speculation can be proven.

The central School Board appeared to have no particular interest in the success (or failure) of ACSP. Apparently, it was rarely mentioned

at School Board meetings. This city is much like a colony. There are no elected officials except the School Board. Important programmatic and policy issues seem to be frequently ignored in favor of more political ones during School Board meetings. The neglect of Anacostia geographically continued to be echoed in the lack of attention paid its schools, at least according to ACSP administrators, principals, and teachers.

There is a message of a cancelling of national commitment which is implicit in the recent premature termination of ACSP. In an unexpected decision last November, the Project was ended two years ahead of schedule.

The Director of Special Projects of the Office of Education, maintained that it was not a matter of commitment to *this kind* of Project, but of the failure of *this* Project. In saying so, however, he agreed that the muddle in O.E., the Central School System, as well as in ACSP, were all co-conspirators in failure. He pointed to other places around the country where community control has been used enthusiastically and has succeeded.

This Project is fundamentally different. This attempt to reform inner-city schools through decentralization and community-responsiveness is representative of schools that are largely unprepared, apathetic and beset with difficulties. These schools represent a spectrum of what really exists in our inner-city schools, not a utopia.

The lessons to be learned from this experiment have relevance to attempts to revamp the most troubled schools in America with all of the resistances they mount -- the inertia, bureaucracy, and apathy.

When the problems of ACSP surfaced, they should have been faced directly. Pressure should have been applied squarely on ACSP, the Office of Education, and the D.C. school system to reform, reassess, and continue. That would have constituted the kind of commitment necessary to ranking national and local priorities, ones which we cannot afford to letfall by the wayside.

Some Themes of The Social Dilemma

In Anacostia, black, poor, lower class children face middle class, mostly black, teachers who usually live elsewhere. Sharing black skin blinds many to the gulf between child and teacher. The wealth of difficulties and the poverty of resources that face ghetto families threaten teachers. Many of the teachers have only recently escaped the ghetto walls themselves. Others are as far culturally from ghetto life as most white professionals. Only a few black teachers actively identify and empathize with ghetto life. Feeling a gap between themselves and their students, but often denying it, teachers cannot examine and work with differences and the feelings of despair. When differences and feelings are denied, it is difficult to empathize or to help a child deal with his daily plight. The distance a child feels between himself and achievement is a distance full of economic, social, and racial obstacles. The teacher, feeling unable to help, builds more barriers between himself and his students, expressing his own despair in action while denying it to the child. The teacher instead withdraws hope, or builds disciplinary walls.

There is always the potential, between child and adult, of a gulf in understanding. The problem is greater amidst widespread poverty, daily degradation, and a wide cultural gap between teacher and child.

The child, too, may feel threatened by the teacher who embodies unattainable goals and values. Rainwater's work(9) in the Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project of Saint Louis demonstrated that poor blacks held middle class goals and ego ideals, and were widely subject a kind of incipient "cultural depression", since goals are seen as desirable but unattainable. Furthermore the values are firmly internalized. A frequent personality resolution of this impossible combination is the adoption of a "Negative Identity" in Eriksonian terms.(5) The resolution is: "If I can't be somebody good, at least I'll be somebody, even if it's somebody bad."

Changes in social concerns and issues of the day directly affect schools. Increasing or decreasing commitments to elementary education or to the ghetto are directly reflected in changing classroom size, extra teachers, supplies, and community interest in schools. Depending on community or society's degree of interest at a given time, principals and teachers are left alone to function autonomously (and often unhelped) or are scrutinized closely, supported, or hindered. These shifts have a notable effect on the student-teacher interaction.

I have been talking about the reflection of racism, prejudice, and attitude in the classroom. It is a central tenet of Black Militancy that ghetto peoples' mistrust of those who live outside their walls is justified. An in-depth understanding of the nature of paranoia leads us to

expect that there is a core of solid justification in this or any paranoia. But it is already clear that blacks, especially poor blacks, have a great deal to be suspicious about. The most radical of militant black statements, taken literally, is usually no more than simple truth at a social level. Although accusations of violence against blacks are often not true at a personal or interpersonal level, social institutions do impose significant injuries.

Further, a great deal is becoming known concerning the universal existence of "group-related paranoia" as a function of a group's identity formation. Charles Pinderhughes[8] makes the psychoanalytically-derived observation that "denigration" of others is related to the rejection of hated, lower, dirty body parts and parts of oneself. This rejection extends to negative ego identifications, including such characteristics as poor ego control, impulsiveness, dirtiness, and laziness. Further, any group, as part of its formation, cohesiveness, and appeal to loyalty by its own members, needs an external object on which to focus its distrust, vilification and unacceptable aggression. In our society, blacks have often filled that function for whites, or for those blacks who actively identify with white, middle class values. Since even poor blacks or marginally successful blacks often share this identification, they may therefore be bound logically to indulge in a good deal of self-denigration and self-hate.[5,9] When a middle class, professional black meets someone embodying his rejected self in the classroom, he may act out this rejection by feeling guilty, and encourage acting out by the student because of his own feelings of helplessness. But

there are also teachers so identified with helping ghetto children, that they cannot tolerate teachers who are so affected, somewhat like the Northern liberal who cannot tolerate "Southern bigots." The range of reactions and reaction formations is as varied as the individuals involved.

Another aspect of the mistrust and group-related paranoia is the mistrust of outsiders by teachers and school personnel. When the mental health consultant attempts to talk with teachers, he is met with mistrust. The unintentioned cruelty of liberal individuals or organizations, who come with great promises and leave when the going gets tough, is experienced by both teachers and their students. It can be explored as a condition of working in the ghetto, touching a general hopelessness about working conditions and trying to help ghetto children. The theme of hopeless and bitter resentment around frustrated dependency resonates with the feelings of abandonment voiced by ghetto children and their families.

Exploring beyond these external causes of mistrust of outsiders leads to some themes concerning the teachers themselves. Briefly, they include the following:

1) teachers' feelings of inadequacy and mistrust of outsiders who often criticize from a safe position; 2) a sense of teachers' guilt about over-identification and/or rejection of students; 3) their maintenance of distance from problems which are uncomfortable leaves a sense that they aren't doing all they could or should, and that there is something indefinably willful in the "refusal" to do more. Inhibitions are not only unconscious compromises, but are at least partially willful and

answerable to their consciences. This fact is true for everyone and leaves us all a bit mistrusting of outside scrutiny.

In summary, mistrust stems from multiple sources relating to the individual, the small group, the institution, and the society. Mistrust is often related to feelings of personal guilt.

A further dynamic necessary to understanding the harm done to ghetto children and residents involves an understanding of "institutionalized oppression." Pinderhughes has coined the term "processed violence,"(8) referring to the impersonal, socially structured violence we do to "underlings" merely by imposing institutional or social structures on them--never by direct, conscious, personal action. The daily indignities of welfare are reinforced by an economy without room for black employment; public clinics and agencies, simply by their under-staffing and long lines, get across the message "this society doesn't care about your comfort." When teachers give up on poor black children sooner than they do on middle class children, they are imposing "processed violence" on a new generation of black children. They do not initiate the processed violence--they become another agent in a long list of those who perpetuate ghetto bonds.

Consultation Techniques and Theory

My understanding of mental health consultation is that it is a collaborative relationship between consultant and consultee which attempts to enable the consultee to recognize and come to terms with distortions

in his work. These distortions may be thought of as myths, paranoias, unconscious assumptions, or unquestioned institutional "rules." In clarifying and elucidating these distortions, the consultant virtually "lets the chips fall where they may"--as long as he and the consultee agree that this is in the service of the consultee's work and task. The underlying assumption is that the consultee (an individual or a group) will have more conscious choice in how to carry out his task as the distortions are clarified. Fundamental in the nature of a relationship between colleagues is that there is no pressure on the consultee to accept anything the consultant says. He is free to accept or reject it, leaving him free to decide what makes sense to him. The consultant is only a resource to him.

Unlike supervision or teaching, the content of "consultation" by this definition is the distortions which detract from task and goal orientation. The two bodies of theory which I find most useful in conceptualizing mental health consultation are: 1) Gerald Caplan's concept of theme-interference-reduction[2,3] and 2) Bion's concepts of basic assumption group life.[1] I shall discuss these very briefly.

Caplan spelled out a method of consultation to an individual consultee which derives from psychotherapy. The consultant listens for themes of distortions which appear in the work material presented to him by his consultee. He determines how they interfere with the consultee's work, and then works with the consultee to reduce the interference by these distortion themes. This echoes a thematic approach to psychotherapy, in which a

therapist helps a patient correct his distorted themes which emerge in the course of therapy.

Caplan's work was formulated around working with one consultee. I have needed to extend it to work with groups. I do so by employing Bion's concepts. Bion stated that groups might be thought of as consisting of two elements: work groups and basic assumption groups. Both exist, to varying extents, within the same physical group. Basic assumption life is the underlying, essentially "group unconscious" life which determines and characterizes its non-task-oriented life. The better the work group's task coincides with the kind of basic assumption which is prevalent, the more they work synergistically. With a poor fit, the basic assumption life seriously undermines the work group.

Basic assumption life, says Bion, falls into three major areas, which may alternate in any one group. They are: 1) the dependency group--one which assumes the attitude of depending on the leader for guidance and nourishment, and acts as if helpless to take action itself; 2) the fight-flight group, which either has a dominant motivation to flee or to attack; 3) the pairing group, in which two members work together to bring forth the messiah who is the hope of the group and who must remain unborn and undefined.

Added to Bion's original list may be other subsidary "basic assumptions" or persistent themes which are not reducible to the original three. One I have found to be particularly powerful in interracial work is basic assumption guilt, which will be illustrated below.

The "basic assumption" concept enables me to apply Caplan's thematic approach to groups. Basic assumption as "group theme" serves the same function for the group as themes do for individuals. Furthermore, the dominant basic assumptions in a group are a clue to the feelings generated within the parent organization. (6)*

Group Consultation

A group of elementary teachers, meeting weekly with two consultants, spent their first two months focusing on dependency and trust issues. The first two meetings focused on the dependency theme "the consultants must provide answers," despite the previous year's experience of the two most vocal teachers that the consultants did not do so.** Moving reluctantly, to more self-directed efforts, an agenda of problems for study was established by the teachers. But the first teacher, Miss B., to suggest a formal model "for more attention to individual needs and more teacher flexibility," got into a battle with other teachers who felt she was accusing them of being inadequate as teachers (basic assumption fight). In turn Miss B.

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*See Miller and Rice for an extensive discussion of the relationship of organizational task and group functions which impede or further it.

**A good deal of this year's early mistrust had to do with one of the consultant's recent television news appearance in support of the ACSP. Teachers felt the ACSP had been an imposition they did not trust, and were dubious about trusting the consultant.

felt attacked and bruised, although the other teachers denied the attack and denied responsibility for it if there had been one (denial of basic assumption guilt). The group members withdrew from each other for several weeks (flight) and gradually began to talk of their experience of isolation, which they partly maintained because it gave them a safety zone.

Questions of their commitment began to arise--to the school, the children, and to each other--and with it a theme of "fearing betrayal." One of the consultants introduced the concept of the "Judas myth in the group," occasioned by the feeling of betrayal when one of the members reported to another who had been absent, that in a recent session "Miss B. and Mr. T. really went at each other." The group managed to overlook the fact that the alleged indiscretion had not been to the outside world, but to a group member who had often spoken for unquestioned good will and a pollyanna-like faith. They thereby symbolically made her an outsider. They then moved to questions of not trusting each other. At first it was said that criticisms of the school could not be made without "talking about the top" (i.e., the principal), and "who could guarantee those criticisms wouldn't be heard or be reported to her?" (More flight)

Using Mrs. D.'s statement that 'I never know what you (the consultants) are going to tell me I've said, so I shut up,' one of the consultants noted that, "The fear of the 'Judas' is inside

each of us. A fear that we would be our own betrayer makes each of us hide." At the end of the session, Miss P. remarked that maybe the real fear is that the inadequacies are in us, and that is what will get to the top.

In the following session, the conversation began by attention to the inadequacy of school system-sponsored services for troubled children. A consultant's comment to the effect that "the group is beginning by blaming others" (a "fight" basic assumption) stimulated Mr. D., who had been afraid of betraying himself, to say "He was glad we had found fault with the teachers again, since he had grown to expect it of us." But Miss B. (who had been the first teacher to try to expound her view of effective teaching some weeks before) moved promptly to describe a 12 year old girl: Tanya was a slow learner, working at the pre-primary level, although actually in the sixth grade. Miss B. felt unable to reach her ... well it turns out she knows how, but doesn't take the time. Furthermore, how fair would it be to give this girl special attention, when all children would need it and might retaliate by overwhelming the teacher with special demands? (flight basic assumption). Both consultants felt that there was a high degree of identification between Miss B. and the child, supported in part by Miss B.'s taking on the physical characteristics and role of the girl while describing her. However, this was not commented on in order to allow "the child to speak

for the teacher," as the teacher talked. The consultants felt Miss B. was speaking for a large part of the group present. It turned out that several of the teachers and counselors present knew the child well and shared the sense of frustration. Therefore the consultants speculated that a paraprofessional aide (a community reading assistant) who had been seen shouting at Tanya was experiencing the same frustration as teachers. Instead of disparaging the aide's style of response, her reaction to Tanya was, in all likelihood, one for which teachers could feel empathy.

The consultants commented on the new turn in the group--that this was the first time someone had shared a problem she felt to be her own, including an overt admission of "feeling guilty"--and the conviction others felt many of the same things. This comment was designed both to protect her from a repetition of the scapegoating (which she had in part invited), and to attempt to limit guilt-provoked "fight" responses from others. The other consultant encouraged group self-examination and problem-solving around dealing with this child's *kind* of problem. This led to agreement that all had experienced this problem, some with more feeling of success than others. The consultants commented on the teacher's feeling of potential innundation if they satisfied any child's "special" needs, and the group shared ways of keeping this "threat" in check.

Underneath Miss B.'s guilt had been an "assumption of doom" for the child, either because of her unmet special needs, or because of the alienating character style she used to draw others into a fight (not too different from Miss B.'s style when on the defensive). The best interpretation against the assumption of doom, the consultants felt, was the work-oriented conviction that teachers could come up with ways to help each other, both with difficult practical problems, and with overwhelming feelings of inadequacy. This seemed to be the best argument against the defensive barriers which keep them from sharing and supporting each other.

Another theme dealt with in the group was that the teachers felt turned off by lower class children's language and directness, reacting in a way that turned the child off and shut him out. Since much of the material which was thought to be difficult to discuss had culturally-determined value judgments attached, this presented an opportunity to work on the unconscious barriers between middle class teacher and lower class child. Issues such as a student's illegitimate pregnancy, drugs, stealing, "primitive" family conditions, discussions about sex, were unapproachable because they made teachers feel awkward themselves. Exploration of similar issues in terms of their own lives, enabled them to consider broaching the subjects with students. As they began to identify their own assumptions and prejudices as themes which inhibited useful work, they approached these barriers with a new enthusiasm.

Several elements of this group are worth commenting on: 1) the successive development of, and emergence into conscious working area of the basic assumption dependency, fight-flight, fusion, pairing and guilt. Although these have been present from the first as elements which hindered mutually-supported interdependent problem solving, only gradually have they emerged into a form to be confronted by the group. There have been frequent comments along the way to support the contention that this represents a problem in the school's overall climate or culture, as well as at the level of the individual classroom and teacher.

One system theme, echoing from Central School Board to classroom, is the systematic infantilization in the schools--an aspect of the system taking care of individual anxiety at the cost of stifling the opportunity for initiative.(7) An authoritarian hierarchy calms anxiety by tight organization which relieves individuals of responsibility at every level and encourages dependency. One teacher commented that "if she treated children outside of school in the demeaning, infantilizing way she did at school, it would be inappropriate and demoralizing." This quickly led to the recognition that the way children were treated at school was also inappropriate, and that it had a great deal to do with the way teachers treated themselves and each other. Recognition of their complicity was part of beginning to take responsibility for their own actions in their classroom, in relation to both co-workers and children, in the school and beyond.

2) The themes which emerge in the group appear to have a definite, direct relationship to themes which interfere in the classroom, so that

displacements of issues on to pupil-teacher relationships and interpretations about them work at the superficial level, and cut to deeper levels of basic assumption life in the teacher's group and the individual's life.

3) Teachers can help each other with many practical problems. A critical aspect of our work is to help a climate of sharing emerge by encouraging study of those aspects of basic assumption life which interfere. This work itself becomes a prop for tenuous self-esteem, allowing teachers to share problems which expose their feelings of guilt, shame, and self-doubt. We hope thereby to clear the way for the emergence of some "basic assumption hope" which can lead to productive, interdependent work with the school.

Extension to Institutional Level

Group consultation can relate to the need for institutional change if a focus of the group and a concern of the consultant is the relationship of the group themes to the organization. On occasion, work with one such group within a school can lead to a shift in the overall climate--if for instance the teachers involved are influential (something which can be arranged in the initial contract with the principal,) or become influential as they feel more confident or committed, or if they begin to publically question some organizational "givens," which were not previously questioned effectively.

Such was the case with this group as illustrated with the theme of infantilization discussed above, and as is illustrated by some the matters considered the previous year.

Teachers had been selected for the group as being either the grade chairmen or their selected representative. The school counselors, who are also para-administrative personnel, were included. To some extent, therefore, the group represented or had influence on the school administration. The members were concerned as a group with school-wide issues, and these were a frequent focus. When an approach emerged to a problem, group members were in a position to try to implement it and to bring subsequent developments back to the group for further consideration. During this process, organization-wide "basic assumptions" could be questioned and attacked in the group.

Another aspect of stimulating school-wide change comes because successful kinds of relationships tended to proliferate to teachers outside the group. After our first half-year of consultation, the principal commented that admitting to problems and sharing with each other had become more prevalent in the school as a whole. Although we felt this comment was overly-optimistic, it did indicate a beginning. A brief example, illustrates the effect of considering a practical issue.

> A frequent topic in the first 20 sessions of the above group concerned the CRA's (Community Reading Assistants) who were said to be lazy and arrogant. These indigenous workers had been hired to help teachers with reading. They represented, as a group, a major innovation of the ACSP. Discussion began when the CRA's were unable to provide coverage so that teachers could attend our meeting. We discussed alternative explanations for their refusal. Was it their fear of the classroom given an impossible "messianic" message about

their task? Was it the teacher's hostility which kept them out? Or the difficulties for teacher and parent of being in the classroom together? (CRA's were often parents.) As time went on, the focus turned from blaming the CRAs, to proposing, then attempting, a series of solutions. Some used the teachers' union to get clear working agreements. Others worked at changing their own understanding, attitude, and working relationship with the CRA, to provide more support and supervision. Mutual distrust and uneasiness decreased, and teachers began to provide needed technical assistance to the non-professional worker.

Pre-School Program

The Pre-School Unit, directed by Mrs. Austine Fowler, strives for an education of pre-school children, with the involvement of their families, towards the development of a program which serves and is responsive to the community in as many ways as possible. There are hopes to broaden the program to include the next few years of the children's experience, and to begin social and educational change by getting these families and children to significantly influence their communities and schools later on. There are also plans for an early childhood program from ages three months to three years. The focus from day to day is not on continuing the organization at any cost, not on anyone's own job, or satisfying the needs of other threatening organizations, but on the task of building a community pre-school program for children and their families. Incident-

ally, this program has separate funding from ACSP and will continue.*

These conditions satisfy my need to consult to an organization whose optimal functioning would delight me. Work that my colleagues from psychodrama and I have engaged in has the prior approval and active participation of all levels of this program. There have been disagreements and "negotiations" about ways of understanding children or working with a program, but no disagreement about the need to do so. Let me describe the three basic components of our current consultation with the preschool unit.

1) Administrative Consultation

I meet weekly with Mrs. Fowler to discuss whatever is "happening" in the program, impinging on the program, or concerning her. This is not psychotherapy, but I do meet with her in her capacity both as the head of a program, and as a person. I come as someone with an outside perspective, some consultative skills (whose relevance is not assumed until mutually ratified), and as a person who shares concerns and administrative experience. I view our meetings, first, as a collaborative meeting of two people. Neither of us knows which particular subject matter will help our work. For instance, both of us are at a remove from the central ACSP office, yet both concerned and partly involved. We may discuss either ACSP from our different perspectives, or may consider matters of

*ACSP is funded by the U.S. Office of Education, but this unit is almost entirely funded by the D.C. Urban Planning Office, and will continue after ACSP is terminated in August, 1972.

her own program.

Second, I get to know the problems of a school for poor, black children. As neither a teacher nor an educator, I appreciate the privilege of sharing Mrs. Fowler's experience. Our topics range from specific children and families, to problems in staff relations, to difficulties in dealing with the larger context of the Public School System. For instance, Mrs. Fowler has lost a good deal of money for supplies because of the structure of the procurement system of the public school. As she told me about this, she also told me that it infuriated her that obvious, but unnamable and unprovable corruption was stealing from "her children" (a kind of "processed violence" done to them). It incensed her so much that she didn't know if she could stay in her job for long. (This was not the only time we have agreed that corruption in the school system seemed rampant and obvious, but not provable).

I began to fear that a peripheral struggle and her "Stubborn Dutch" qualities would deprive these children and this program of the leadership it needed. At the time I saw myself as helping her to see the system as one which was aligned, in a "processed violence" way, to drive her and anyone like her out of it. I urged her to save her do-or-die efforts for the basic struggles, not for every bit of "processed violence" which aroused moral outrage. (I view "moral outrage" as a trap, exploited by such a self-serving bureaucracy to weed out those with principles). I very much agreed with Mrs. Fowler that if the job could not be done without basic compromise, it should not be done--but this seemed to me peripheral battle "designed" by centuries to defeat people like her, and capable of

doing so.

I go to such lengths to demonstrate my naivete in retrospect, because I believe Mrs. Fowler has been through this far more often that I have and knew very well to "keep her powder dry." But I did serve the function of a "neutral party" who could help her to vent rage and get back to work without feeling degraded by compromise. It is difficult, while working in a bureaucracy which is fundamentally degrading, to keep a clear sight on integrity--and to puzzle out when one should shrugg off an insult, and when one must do more than that. I think that is one of the functions I fill. It is of note again that this battle parallels the systematic daily exploitation of ghetto children and their families.

A third function is more technical. I bring my own experience as an administrator in a very different kind of program, along with my skills derived from psychology and psychotherapy. In a process that is not very different from Caplan's Theme Interference Reduction,[2,3] I share with Mrs. Fowler my thoughts on the themes which keep new administrative alternatives from presenting themselves to her or others in the program. Differing from Caplan's model, I do not refrain from bringing in somewhat personal material which she has previously shared with me. For instance, we have discussed the issues of growing up poor and black in Washington, making it, and the pull to dissociate oneself from painful origins. We have discussed people we feel are trying to dissociate themselves from the ghetto, and therefore having difficulty with their students. We also discussed the problem of the paraprofessionals who work hand-in-hand with teachers, but who are from this ghetto.

There are inherent problems the paraprofessionals face in their job: working longer hours, fewer vacations, less pay than teachers, and yet they try to be equal partners with teachers. The problems of "racism" or "classism" are embodied in the teamwork of teacher and paraprofessionals and brought into every classroom. Problems in the management of staff require an understanding of race and class-interaction dynamics, something both of us struggle with. I add my contribution from social psychiatry and clinical work, to her first hand knowledge and training in education. She has experienced far more of what we are dealing with than I have, and I'm quite sure I learn at least as much from our work as she does. We have been able to discuss the relationship of personal experiences to the experiences of children and teachers, and to draw on ourselves as resources. I describe a limited role for myself, because I feel the consultant's role is limited indeed. She does the job, I share observations; if they are helpful, she uses them; if not, she discards them.

I have learned something specifically from Mrs. Fowler which I want to discuss, because in her and in her classrooms is the only place I have really found it in this disheartened community.

It is the quality of hope. It permeates her ambition, her plans, and those of the people around her. It marks an important difference with what I hear from other schools and other institutions. She says, essentially, "we do not have enough; this program in this morass is not enough, but I have an idea of what would be enough, and it is within our reach."

Practically speaking, what she has in mind is a program which begins in infancy for the high-risk child, later for other children and their families, and takes them through the third or fourth grades. It would give them enough time to know what they want and how to get it, so that they could begin to fight for themselves. It focuses on building "fight" into the people of the community themselves.

Robert Coles, in an eloquent document, *TEACHERS AND THE CHILDREN OF POVERTY*(4) writes of the results of a survey he did of school systems serving poor, black children around the country. The group of schools in which children, their parents, and their teachers thought that these children might, just might, make it, were the schools with hope and drive, The other schools had the same innovative programs, but no spirit of hope. Whether they were in a desperate ghetto or a suburb with mostly middle class children, schools with a spirit of genuine optimism were the ones which seemed to be working.

There remains, for Coles and for us, the crucial question of how to make hope appear where it is not, and how to help those who have it use it well. One clue, I believe, is to ask those who seem to possess it where they got it. I'd like to share a vignette which stands for much what I have found to be most meaningful in what Mrs. Fowler has said.

J.O. was a legend among children who grew up in the black poor Cardoza area of Washington, D.C. over the last 30 years. Working for the Recreation Department as a roving playground director, he provided children with firmness, love, and guidance. He brooked no compromise with principle, was satisfied with no less than his judgment of best

performance. He persisted, unless he felt a child had betrayed both himself and J.O. He was also stubborn and hard-headed. The qualities J.O. embodied and transmitted are what we are talking about. Our forms of helping ourselves and others carry on and persist despite the difficulties of the ghetto, of decreasing national commitment to us and our children, are our attempt to "institutionalize" the kind of love, hope, honesty, and toughness, first with ourselves, that J.O. stood for. He developed a community from scratch, and it continues to spread through people like Mrs. Fowler. "J.O. was everywhere. You thought you had given him the slip, and he would show up from nowhere and stare you down. You knew you'd been caught."

J.O. represents a major character in "the Messiah theme." Next to him, everyone of us represents a potential Judas--we can betray him, betray the cause, betray the children. He seems not only to have sparked love, but guilt as well. He is always coming around the corner just when we mere mortals are caught--human, fallible, and faltering.

The messianic expectation is an appropriate basic assumption to this kind of work often. It has characterized my own feeling while working with Mrs. Fowler. I've become aware of feeling a bit like a "white knight" joining her to fight off "black despair." I use these caricature terms to express the excessiveness of "hope-without-work" which can interfere with work--and which is easily open to attack of the "Judas- within-us."

Against empty hope we pit working together to increase understanding of issues--including those of self-betrayal.

Part of the attraction of the Judas theme concerns the impossibility of living up to J.O.'s legend, the guilt he engendered, and the despair one can feel in oneself. Or one can reject others who are struggling with life in an less-than-perfect way. This theme is very much part of the "perfection" of J.O., and is contradicted even by some of his own flaws. For instance, as his "children" grew beyond his control, he rejected people he had cared for as children, on slight pretext at times--apparently with a kind of excessive self-righteousness. He found it difficult to "just let go" when it was time, without swinging to total rejection. That, in us, remains a theme which can interfere with work in the ghetto.

2) Psychodrama Consultation to Faculty

Psychodrama focuses on the dramatic representation of psychic and interpersonal conflicts to facilitate their study and mastery. For instance, in one session with the Pre-School staff, a metaphorical "barrier" between students and teachers was acted out by a group member who stood between the people, taking the roles of teacher and students, moving to stay between them wherever they went. Using this technique, trading roles, examining the components of one's feelings, and using the dramatic attempt to carry fantasies to fruition, gives an opportunity to study the same issues I have been discussing. The predominent theme in the groups run weekly for all the staff of the Pre-School program, have been those of the "class distinctions" between teacher and paraprofessional, adults and children, director and staff. Working out relationships, as a matter of growth in relating to the children, has led to a spread of esprit and openness. I only hear of the progress of this part of our team's effort

indirectly from Mrs. Fowler and the psychodrama group leaders.* I think it is important that we have different people involved in these two aspects, for doing both the administrative consultation and the direct work with the staff is difficult. (See discussion below)

Finally, for fun, one of the other psychodrama staffers** and I undertook weekly role playing sessions with a class of four-year-olds in the pre-school, in collaboration with Mr. Ronald Green, the paraprofessional, and Mrs. Helen Fisher, the teacher. We have learned from the children as we have everywhere we've gone in this organization. With disadvantaged children we find it is more difficult to focus on a theme than with middle class children. The children of ghetto schools are not exactly the same as those of the suburb. More firmness, more physicality, more directness and direction from teachers seem some of the technical differences required. There is the same fear and love of parents and adults, the same struggle for mastery. But there is the matter of a repressive and hostile world around them, which cannot be denied. If they are to feel it can be handled as a matter of growth and mastery, it must be dealt with openly, yet without dispair.

Our more productive sessions have been fascinating. For instance Halloween led to sessions role-playing goblins and monsters who would have

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*Don Hearn of the Saint Elizabeths Hospital Psychodrama Department collaborated in this venture and with the community organizers. Gene Cole, also from Psychodrama, also worked with the Pre-School staff.

**A third psychodramatist, Martha Adcock.

liked to be friends, but were more frightened themselves than frightening. Christmas brought children who were anxious as they awaited Santa -- anxious in part because they were angry at him but not supposed to mention it. It suddenly became clear to us that the well-known parents' threats "you'd better be good or else Santa will bring you coal and switches" were not only resented but were a cause for real anxiety. The children were angry that they had to keep earning gifts and love, which might be lost at the last moment. It seemed very unfair to them--and to us. But it also gave an opportunity to work on the many situations in which children feel both love and hate for the people most important to them. Mr. Green played a very human Santa who encouraged a full range of expression of the children's ambivalence, guilt, and sometimes tenuous expectations, as well as a full range of more optimistic feelings.

Community Organizing Unit

The Community Organization Unit was to catalyze community involvement, from the formation of community school boards, to the employment of local personnel. The fourteen Community Organizers were informally assigned the task of assuring ACSP responsiveness to community needs and of building community involvement in the project. This meant being a gadfly, keeping the ACSP "honest", attentive to its goals and to the community. This group therefore embodies, and can be expected to be subjected to, all the conflicts which beset such an organization. They were often thought of, literally, as determining the success or failure of the project. But they were the least trained workers, with the vaguest

goals and the most inconstant leadership. Perhaps their failure reflects a fundamental ambivalence by the Project about itself.

The exploitation felt by the community organizers was expressed in every phase of our work with them. They felt exploited as ghetto residents, as objects of study, as "low men" in their organization, and as "strangers in their own land". Their suspicion of us was expressed when one organizer said: "I know what you're here for--you're here to write a book about us," but they also resented project officials who frequently demeaned them.

This group brought the elements of community life into the ACSP since they were all community residents.* Therefore, it represented an interface between community and Project Administrators within ACSP itself, and echoed outside problems within the organization.

The unit was administered with confusion of role and function, an unclear hierarchy, and changing management. There were frequent complaints by organizers that they were told to sample community needs, but that when they tried to voice them in ACSP meetings, they were silenced and belittled. No clear and functioning line of communication for feedback from the community was ever established. The allegience which these

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*This was one of the two units employing significant numbers of community residents in other than clerical jobs. Besides the 14 employed in this unit, there were approximately 150 residents employed as Community Reading Assistants. Since I did not have first-hand experience with the "CRAs", I will not discuss them at length.

workers felt to their community and each other was frequently felt to be at odds with the Project--not with it's stated goals, but with their view of its functioning. Organizers complained that "the Project acted as if it did not want to hear what they had to say," and instead wanted them to function as errand boys. They felt they were cast as administration apologists and front men, perhaps sanctioning the community status of ACSP by their continued participation in something they did not trust. While I worked with them, there was progressive confusion, apathy, loss in self-esteem, and role diffusion. Workers who felt they had been hired to participate in a community affair, and who could have been well employed as "in-house gad-flies," felt progressively exploited.

Early in our consultation with them, a large part of the difficulty appeared to be their lack of training and confusion about purpose. During this time, psychodrama and group consultation techniques were used as described for the Pre-School Unit. Working jointly with a group of school counselors to explore mutual suspicions and projections of the two groups led to more collaboration and understanding between them.

Some of these sessions were dramatic, such as one concerning 9 and 10 year-old boys who were asking about drugs in a counselors' group for pre-delinquents. With our group role-playing, a scenario developed in which a pusher cunningly planned to entice a child to use drugs, under the noses of parents and school personnel. There was a sharing of perpectives by community people, who were quite close to those problems, and the school-based counselors.

But it became increasingly evident that the organizers' poor training, inconsistent leadership, and position as scapegoat was encouraging their paralysis, malaise, and feeling of exploitation.. While we continued to work directly with the organizers, we recognized the continual stresses imposed from above. I began meeting with their director in administrative consultation, discussing ideas of increased clarity for the unit's functioning, as well as other problems he faced.

In retrospect, my dual role presents a great deal of difficulty. Although I maintained neutrality and confidentiality, I became an external focus for the mutual suspicion which echoed the distress of the parent-organization. A role which we attempted to institute, that of becoming joint consultants to director and organizers, with joint meetings to review ongoing work, did not materialize until a second year of work.

The effective functioning of this unit would have required 1) autonomy from the central administration of ACSP, with freedom to bring community concerns and criticisms; (This need parallels the need of ACSP to be autonomous from the D.C. School Board.) 2) sanction and support for maintaining loyalties to community and each other in a way consistent with the task of ACSP; 3) clear and consistent leadership with rigorous training. Effective community organization and increasing responsiveness of the schools would have brought task and loyalties closer together for the organizers. As it was, increasing frustration and unrest became the hallmark of this group..

As consultant, I felt caught in a trap in this unit. A problem of a unit's functioning could not be worked out within the unit itself for multiple reasons. In retrospect, I felt pulled into a difficult dual role --one which might have been less compromising in a more smoothly working system, but which represented the same kind of divided loyalties for me that the director of ACSP and ACSP itself are in. At the time I felt I could sort out these difficulties and remain effective. From my current perspective I feel that even if I could, I could probably not convince those around me that I had. Given the complexity of this task for one person, it is probably better not to try to personally bridge the gap.

Furthermore, I came to feel that the organizers suffered from difficulties which originated in the whole system and needed to be worked on at that level. For an intervention to have been thoroughly effective, it would have had to focus directly on root causes, organizationally. There are several reasons why this was not possible. The administration was closed to me because the administration saw no need for fundamental change. Organizational and personal ambivalence mitigated against exploration of fundamental difficulties. One beginning, at a conference discussing roles and purposes of the ACSP, was not pursued. I was an outsider, a white, untested psychiatrist. Establishing trust in such situations is difficult and often takes years. The same internal divisions which make an outsider useful and essential, also arouse suspicion about him and his motives. In a black organization, a white outsider has an additional disadvantage, although I do not regard that barrier as insurmountable.

Time ran out. Developing trust, changing centuries of oppression with collusion by the oppressed, takes some time. Three years is not enough. This organization failed to head directly for its goals of autonomy and increased responsiveness. Personal agendas and motives impaired difficult decisions initially and mitigated against later change.

With all this going on above them, it was not surprising that the community organizers felt exploited, although no one person was doing so directly. It was also not surprising that there was a pull for a well-intentioned outsider into the middle of the conflicts, for them to depend on him to solve them, and some frustration when he either refused or failed.

DISCUSSION

There is a clash between community interest and the institutional oppression of the public school bureaucracy, and it echoes from child to School Board. The school system is not responsive to the people it purports to serve for many reasons: the "processed violence" of institutionalized racism and classism; the self-maintaining needs of bureaucracies; the use of infantilizing rules and roles to relieve individual anxieties at the cost of individual initiative.

For this reason, community control of institutions seems critical in order to encourage self-determination at the individual level. Erikson[5] discusses the cruel hoax of encouraging individual expression in elementary school, only to have adolescents discover that they are narrowly circumscribed in adult concerns by society and its agents.

Prevailing institutions will act to preserve the status quo with whatever steps are necessary--law, tradition, withdrawal of funds, and appeals to the conscience of the oppressed minority "not to victimize the majority." We can expect them to vigorously challenge any institution whose purpose is social change. But even as an institution establishes itself to promote social change, it too becomes a new "establishment." It begins to bureaucratize and carry out oppression itself, taking characteristics of the institution it was designed to displace. Like the old institution which it battles, it is made up of people with needs for security, and with ambivalence about their own conflicting goals.

But for a social change organization to remain vital and survive in any meaningful sense, it must achieve change in major ways, or it cannot long justify its existence. The difficulty of doing all the same tasks as the old institution, while also engineering for change, is immense. Each of the schools in the ACSP is an enormous factory, with an average of more than 1000 children per school. Shear size makes it difficult to do more than day-by-day management, requiring mass production techniques and automatization. These techniques, while felt to be necessary, are a powerful force against responsiveness. Furthermore, many of the people who are hired into the new organization need security themselves, a need which also works against their effective participation in battling for change.

These regressive pulls may become so great that the social change movement dies, mired in compromise, for it may begin to act as if its

primary task were to survive any cost. That is the same "evil" as the old, deposed institution. This danger is probably greater in government-sponsored radical experiments, where the impetus did not originate with the community which, even as it fights, remains burdened by institutional oppression and apathy.

A consultant can only agree to consult to an organization if its improved functioning, or the improved functioning of the individuals in it, will lead to goals consistent with the aims *both* of the organization, and of the consultant. Otherwise, if things begin to change, the two will either part company as their differences become obvious, or continue talking together without heading anywhere.

Ordinarily, a mental health consultant works in an organization like a school because he agrees with the fundamental goal of helping children to grow through acquiring skills (the schools' primary *stated* goal), and because he feels furthering this goal helps with his primary goal of practicing preventive psychiatry. In this case two different primary goals are quite compatible.

It is fundamental to the well-being of ghetto children that there be social and educational reform. I can support at least one facet of mental health, by seeking out institutions whose agenda is reform, and supporting it, lending my skills to the effort, and asking with them "what gets in the way of the change."

I have discussed some themes encountered in consultation to an organization attempting social reform. There are difficulties at every

level: in shedding old securities for new uncertainties; in becoming aware of processed violence and beginning to combat it; and in becoming intolerant of apathy, mediocrity, and compromise within the school system and within ourselves.

The greatest processed violence in the ghetto is the systematic destruction of a child's hope that legitimate and available methods will work. Without this hope, no personal growth is felt to be possible in socially acceptable ways. The fundamental task of a consultant is to plumb and share the hopelessness, to lighten the shadows of resentment and apathy which cover despair and paralyze children and teachers. Only when this happens can hope be possible, and with it the power to begin again.

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